

Compensating for Compensation

What on earth does it mean when someone says 'your dog is compensating'? I am convinced that this statement is used too much in situations when individuals do not have it properly explained, yet not enough when it presents a serious potential issue. Let me try and put this statement in plain words; if you imagine your dog has a straight line running through him from his nose to the tip of his tail, this needs to remain in-line and straight for your dog to function properly. To keep it straight all his limbs need to be applying the same amount of force, weight bearing and drive when moving or stationary. If however, there is a weakness in one leg, that line will form a 'kink' as there is not enough power coming from that region to maintain the congruency or alignment; therefore the opposite leg will have to work extra hard to pull that 'line' back to the centre. This extra force from the opposite or diagonal leg is the very beginning of compensation, extra force being used for the loss of power on the other side; therefore the leg opposite to the original site of injury or dysfunction will over work. This region will in time become so overworked that it will also be needing support. The overwork or compensation caused by the body trying to iron out the initial and then subsequent 'kinks' will have further implications by in effect travelling through the body in a zig-zag configuration, constantly overworking and attempting to regain that straight centred 'line' and maintain the dogs balance as much as possible.

The dog's body has an intrinsic defence mechanism, that we all have, for these compensatory issues to try and rectify an existing issue. This is purely an instinct to retain as much mobility as possible, because for dogs, mobility equals survival.



A typical chronic compensation issue.

Too much rehabilitation and too many treatments today are spent dealing with the issue in hand and with little consideration given to how the body as a whole is reacting to the isolated dysfunction. Within Myotherapy we see more problems created through compensatory issues than perhaps primary disorders. These compensatory issues can be the cause of so much pain and discomfort and can give off highly misleading symptoms which can lead to the dog experiencing prolonged investigations because of the numerous problems caused from one original issue.

The Labrador pictured is a typical 'older' dog that is suffering from chronic compensation issues. As is visible, he has a highly developed neck and shoulders and very light hind quarters. This is a dog that had chronically weak hips, not hip dysplasia as such. This weakness has manifested itself by all the power or drive gradually being redirected from the hind legs (or the engine of the dog) to the front of the dog. We call this dog 'front wheel drive'. You can see that the shoulders and the neck have over developed muscle and are not 'overweight' as some people think. The symptoms of this are slow to develop and have an insidious effect, as, bit by bit, parts of his body are being overstressed. Typical signs of this type of compensation are stiffness, generally initially in his back legs. This may disappear after a little exercise, so is possibly ignored as the symptoms apparently ease off. Then a little bit less interest in playing, therefore the conclusion is usually 'oh well he is getting old'; In fact, he is not "just getting older", his muscles are overloaded and uncomfortable. Then later his collar becomes a little tight and the explanation is 'he is putting on weight'; then there is a minor intermittent lameness, this time in his front leg/s. By the time it has arrived as well as his front legs his neck would be affected too, especially as the collar, that is now really quite tight, has gone up another hole. At this point, his neck is fully implicated. This is when other symptoms can come into play: more sleeping, (headaches), real reluctance to play, a lack of his old joy of life, possibly digestive problems, defensive issues towards other dogs, keeping himself more to himself (see article 'Do Dogs Have Headaches Too? Dog World April 2010). All of these and possibly more can be as a result of a slightly weakened back end that could have originally been assisted through a more appropriate exercise plan.

The above course of events could also apply to a dog with a cruciate injury if he does not receive correct treatment **before** and **after** any surgical intervention. We have found that the recovery rate is infinitely improved if a dog has Myotherapy before and after any surgical intervention of this kind. This is because if a cruciate injury has been caused through a trauma or it has been a problem for some time, then there will be other muscular issues involved. If these can be addressed then post operatively the dog will have less of a 'tug on that line' as the muscles supporting the injured leg and the other legs will be in a better condition and balance.

If only injuries suffered within the working dogs were dealt with as soon as possible! Most active and working dogs, in our experience, are unable to perform, not because of a direct injury, but due to the compensatory efforts following a minor injury or stress issue. So many of our agility and obedience clients have now seen how quickly their dogs can come back to their activity if they are checked regularly and any injury treated and rested appropriately, by doing this compensation issues can be kept to a minimum and managed.

We would also like to thank everyone who supported our Charity Dog Show and evening and are delighted to announce we made £756.14 for Cancer and Bio-detection Dog *Charity*.

If you would like to know anything more about this topic and discuss your dog with a Myotherapist, please go to the website www.caninetherapy.co.uk. Or call 0845 3751767.

Just released 'The Complete Dog Massage Manual' by Julia Robertson, call or email mail@caninetherapy.co.uk for details or ordering your copy.